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ABSTRACT

To analyze some of the processes through which student voices and lived experiences can be either excluded or included, a study focused on elements of the classroom environment already addressed in previous analyses, examining "texts and talk" in two middle school English classrooms. The study analyzed how the classroom environments that the teachers constructed--through literature choices, classroom pedagogy, interactions with students, and responses to linguistic and cultural diversity--work in ways that either affirm or exclude the voices and lives of nonmainstream students. The research site was Arnhem, a small upstate New York city, struggling with problems typical of urban communities in the deindustrializing Northeast. Younger Hispanic families moving into the area where older citizens of Polish and Italian descent already lived occasioned a prolonged debate over the role of the schools. A New York State Education Department team investigated charges of racism in the public schools. Administrators mounted an initiative to encourage English teachers to incorporate more multicultural literature selections in class. Transcripts from classroom interactions show general patterns of student-teacher interactions, assumptions about textual authority, and treatment of language difference. Findings suggest that taken-for-granted assumptions about language learning that have undergirded language arts teaching are being called into question; whole language or process approaches to writing and reader-response approaches to literature offer promising alternatives to traditional teaching methods and can provide opportunities for students to bring their own perspectives to their reading and writing. (Contains 60 references.) (NKA)

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Literature Teaching & Learning
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On Exclusion and Inclusion
in
Classroom Texts and Talk

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The percentages of students from backgrounds that are ethnically or linguistically distinct from the white majority are increasing in our schools. For instance, in New York State over 40% of public school students belong to an ethnic minority, and at the national level "minorities" by the mid–21st century are projected to become the majority (Henry, 1990). At the same time that the numbers of ethnic minority students are increasing, they, along with their white working-class peers, continue to lag behind in school on conventional measures of educational achievement that are linked to the likelihood of continuing education and ultimately to economic well-being: school grades, retention rates, high school completion rates, and standardized test scores. Concerns of minority communities over the schooling their children receive, first given a national forum beginning in the 1950s, are today echoed by others disturbed by the glaring educational inequalities that persist for ethnic and linguistic minorities and working-class students.

Among the areas of inquiry considered in the search for explanations for unequal educational outcomes has been the classroom environment itself. Attention to the consequences of "cultural mismatches" between student and teacher, with subsequent calls for "culturally appropriate" or "culturally congruent" instruction, was an early focus beginning in the late 1960s. Increasingly, however, such alterations are viewed as only one element in creating classroom communities that enhance nonmainstream students' opportunities to succeed academically. Moving beyond such classroom alterations, Nieto (1992), for instance, calls for *affirming* diversity in schools; Ladson-Billings urges culturally relevant pedagogy that "provide[s] a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically [and helping] students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities" (1995, p. 476); and Nelson-Barber and Meier stress the need for teachers to create classroom environments that "grant voice and legitimacy to the perspectives and experiences of those who are different from themselves—communities that do not require students to surrender personal and cultural identity in exchange for academic achievement" (1990, p. 5). Their works suggest that teacher responses to students' linguistic and cultural diversity, particularly with domestic minority students who have less reason to accept the legitimacy of the schools (Ogbu, 1978), may be critical in establishing the trust needed for nonmainstream students to consent to learning.

What might such classrooms look like? In this paper I focus on elements of the classroom environment that have been addressed in such analyses, examining "texts and talk" in two middle school English classrooms in order to analyze some of the processes through which student voices and lived experiences can be either excluded or included. I examine how the classroom environments that the two teachers construct—through literature choices, classroom pedagogy, interactions with students, and responses to linguistic and cultural diversity—work in ways that

either affirm or exclude the voices and lives of nonmainstream students. If education that is culturally inclusive and empowering has the potential to play an important role in enhancing the likelihood of students from oppressed groups in society achieving educational success, such practices necessarily bear close examination.

RESEARCH ON CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Before addressing the particulars of the two classrooms, it is useful to examine examples from the research linking classroom practices to student outcomes.

The Role of Cultural Differences

Ethnographic research in schools and communities beginning in the 1960s (e.g., Gumperz, 1982; Keddie, 1973; Leacock, 1971) undermined cultural and linguistic "deficit" explanations (e.g., Bereiter & Engleman, 1966; Heller, 1966) for minority student performance. We now know from such research that literacy activities and expectations in middle class homes more closely conform to those of the school, conferring distinct advantages to mainstream students (see Cook-Gumperz, 1986); for nonmainstream children, a "cultural mismatch" between home and school may translate into educational difficulties that profoundly affect students' access to classroom literacy activities. Au and Jordan (1981), for example, demonstrate how native Hawaiian students' conversational turn-taking strategies in their homes differ from those used in classrooms, creating impediments to student participation in the classroom.

As Heath's work (1983) clearly demonstrates, nonmainstream students' "ways with words" may differ strikingly from those in mainstream communities, where uses of language parallel school expectations. For nonmainstream students, traditional educational practices may inadvertently work to their disadvantage. Teachers, for instance, may rely heavily on "display" questions, privileging middle class students over the nonmainstream students who have been socialized in communities that do not require children to routinely display information. A general lesson to be drawn from Heath's particular case is that, in a class-divided society in which minorities have been largely segregated from mainstream communities and workplaces, distinctive linguistic and cultural differences evolve that also tend to fall out along racial and ethnic lines.

Studies of Native American populations have documented similar interactional difficulties across ethnic lines. For example, Scollon and Scollon (1981), analyzing conversations between Athabaskan Indians and Whites, found that differences in anticipated lengths of time between speakers from the two ethnic groups led to interactional difficulties. White speakers, accustomed to less time between speaker exchanges, frequently assumed that Indian conversational partners had nothing to say and resumed talking without giving their Indian partners adequate opportunities to speak. Such differences in conversational rules clearly have the potential to create problems for Native American students in classrooms with white teachers.

Some students, of course, do succeed despite such cultural mismatches. But teachers can also modify the classroom environment to help avoid some of the interactional difficulties such as those highlighted here. Working with Native Hawaiian students, Project KEEP (Kamehameha Elementary Education Program) teachers, for instance, were able to adjust their classroom

practices to more effectively incorporate the "talk-story" model students learned in homes, thus encouraging greater student participation in classroom learning activities (Au & Jordan, 1981). There are also important pedagogical implications to be drawn from Heath's work in schools (1983) in which teachers and students alike learned to use ethnographic techniques to reduce communication barriers between schools and communities. They explored diverse ways of developing and using language skills, without in the process devaluing those of students' home communities; i.e. nonmainstream children were invested with their own "cultural capital." Mohatt and Erickson (1981), examining classrooms with Native American students, found that teachers using language interaction patterns that most closely resembled those of their Native American students' home cultural patterns were successful at raising student achievement levels. Such findings point to the importance of teachers' awareness of the potential for cultural difference to contribute to student difficulties in traditionally structured classrooms.

Teacher Responses to Classroom Diversity and Student Assent to Learning

While sociolinguists have provided a rich body of research on the subtle classroom interactions that have the potential to contribute to nonmainstream students' difficulties in the classroom, other analyses attend to the consequences of societal inequalities for minority-students in their identity formation and relations to school. Such analyses posit that an oppositional social identity may emerge in response to minority treatment by dominant group members as the minority-students equate conformity to school expectations with a loss of cultural identity (Cazden, Hymes, & John, 1972; Collins, 1988; Ogbu, 1987; Walsh, 1990). In such instances, as Erickson notes, the significance of cultural difference for student achievement takes on a new dynamic:

> Cultural difference can be thought of as a risk factor in the school experience of students and teachers; it need not cause trouble but it usually provides opportunities for trouble. . . Those opportunities can serve as resources for escalating conflict that might already exist for other reasons, such as conflict between social classes, genders, or races. (Erickson & Bekker, 1986, pp. 175-177; cited in Erickson, 1987)

Hegemonic school practices have the potential to transform politically neutral cultural "boundaries" (e.g., non-Standard vs. Standard English pronunciations) into cultural "borders" (e.g., through insistence on "correct" pronunciation) that may engender student resistance and quite possibly loss of trust in their teachers.[1] Teachers willing to question such practices can create educational environments, Erickson argues, that enhance the likelihood of student assent to learning. In addressing such matters, Farr (1991), for instance, advocates a policy of "biloquialism" in teaching a multicultural population:

> Recognition of the differences between the linguistic and cultural resources of nonmainstream students and those that are needed for success in mainstream schools leads to decisions that are essentially political in nature. . . . Eradication, the traditional policy

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[1] A detailed historical and interactional analysis of the standard / vernacular conflict in schooling, explicitly developing the notion of "hegemonic practices," is provided in Collins 1989.

> "long nourished in the English profession" (Fasold & Shuy, 1970, p.x) assumes the undesirability of speech patterns associated with nonmainstream groups and attempts to rid students of these features, replacing them with more desirable "standard" ones. This, in fact, describes the status quo in most schools. . . . Biloquialism calls for the learning of new, standard patterns without eliminating the old nonstandard ones. . . . [T]his pattern attempts to provide mainstream linguistic and cultural resources to nonmainstream speakers, while avoiding negative attitudes toward nonmainstream cultures and dialects (p. 366)

"Whole language" and process writing approaches to teaching literacy are also educational innovations that can permit students to bring diverse "ways with words" and interests to the classroom; in the process, the "cultural capital" embedded in traditional school assumptions and practices is reconfigured. As Harman and Edelsky (1989) note:

> the whole language approach is geared to the creation of texts for real use; it encourages multiple interpretations of existing texts-in-the-world; it honors and uses the language norms students arrive with; it not only accepts "alright" and "ain't" as linguistically legitimate, but it accepts differing discourses, identity kits, and worldviews; it focuses on the ideas students have rather than the ones they lack; it assumes the expansion of roles so that students teach and teachers learn; it sets high but flexible standards; it emphasizes language repertoires rather than right answers; and it fosters questioning, analyzing, speaking up, and writing down. (p. 396)

Ethnographic studies of classrooms in which process writing and whole language approaches have been used with nonmainstream children point to the potential of such approaches for enhancing student involvement in the classroom. Moll and Díaz (1987) report on the success of a project working with low-performing Hispanic junior high school students from low-income backgrounds. Teachers interested in developing students' expository writing were encouraged to use a "process writing" approach, which guides students through stages of writing (pre-writing, drafts, feedback, rewriting), and were also encouraged to draw on issues relevant to the students' lives in establishing writing topics. The most powerful examples of student writing, they reported, were those which drew upon community-related themes: in one instance, students writing on "violence" (a part of their daily lives in the urban inner city); and in another instance, on attitudes toward bilingualism, in which students moved out from student and family views to interview others in the community and school, compile results, and write a persuasive essay on the topic. The point of the above studies is that when the cultural and linguistic capital of the school is reconfigured in such a way as to allow students to draw more successfully on their own resources, greater success may be achieved with children who typically perform more poorly in schools. It is not just teacher-student interaction that is at issue, however, but also the nature of the curriculum. As minority spokespersons and advocates of multicultural education in general underline, school *knowledge* is selective (cf. Harris, 1992; Loewen, 1995; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter, 1991; Swartz, 1992). Proponents for change argue that selectivity may act in ways that affirm or deny important aspects of minority student identity, including language practices, cultural practices, histories, and perspectives that may differ significantly from those of mainstream communities. Critics have emphasized the need to alter traditional school curricula—to

incorporate, for instance, more multicultural literature and new history textbooks into the classroom that better reflect the contributions, diverse histories, and perspectives of the ethnic and racial groups that comprise our nation. Such changes in turn are understood as having the power to positively affirm student identities, empower students, and challenge popular stereotypes in the larger society.

Teachers, then, through their interactions with students, their responses to cultural and linguistic differences in the classroom, and their selection of curricular materials, can affirm or exclude the cultural practices, perspectives, and experiences of nonmainstream students. Advocates for multicultural education have argued that such practices are of profound importance for many students from cultural and linguistic environments that differ from those traditionally incorporated into the schools, as well as for all students living in a culturally pluralistic society. Let us now turn to actual classrooms to see how such practices might be implemented.

The Research Site

Arnhem, the site of the research described in the following pages, is a small upstate New York city (population 22,000) struggling with problems typical of urban communities in the deindustrializing Northeast, in particular the consequences of the steady erosion in past decades of unionized manufacturing jobs and a shrinking tax base in the wake of industrial flight. Tensions between a growing Hispanic population, primarily Puerto Rican,[2] and the city's senior citizens, primarily of Italian and Polish descent, erupted in the late 1980s in the form of a heated and prolonged public debate over whether the schools were implicated in the lower rates of educational achievement experienced by Hispanic youth in the community. Euro-American senior citizens argued that the roots of "racial" inequality were to be found in the general unwillingness of Hispanics to assimilate into the nation's language and culture, alongside their unwillingness to work hard at achieving the "American Dream." Minority activists argued that prejudice, discrimination, and disparagement of their culture and language were primarily responsible for minority students' higher dropout rates and the lower socioeconomic status of the community's Hispanics.[3] A New York State Education Department investigative team was called in to determine whether charges that racism existed in the public schools were valid. They, along with minority activists, called for educational changes that included implementation of a bilingual education program, a more inclusive curriculum, teacher sensitivity training, and attention to prejudice reduction in classrooms. As one component of a program to address the issues raised, school administrators mounted an initiative to encourage English teachers at the secondary level to incorporate more multicultural literature selections into their classrooms.[4]

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[2] The numbers of Hispanics had grown by 70% in the 1980s, to an official count of 12% of the city's population. In the public schools they constituted 17% of the students.

[3] For an in-depth analysis of the debate, see Bigler 1994.

[4] For a detailed analysis of English teachers' responses to multicultural literature and the issues raised by the investigation, see Bigler & Collins 1995.

METHODOLOGY

It was within this context that ethnographic research in the school and community was carried out, ultimately focusing on the larger community debate, responses to cultural difference in the classrooms, and teacher concerns about implementing multicultural education initiatives (in particular the attempts to introduce more multicultural literature into classrooms). The in-school portion of the study included observations of classrooms and school events during the 1991–92 school year; attendance of departmental and regional meetings for English teachers where multicultural literature was a topic of discussion; informal conversations with teachers in the faculty room of the district's middle school; and more formal interviews with school personnel and students over the course of the 1991–92 school year and briefly in the fall of 1992 and 1993. While numerous teachers' classrooms were observed, the researcher (author) ultimately focused on one class that each of three grade 8 English teachers taught. The classes were observed an average of two to three times per week over most of the school year, with the researcher routinely speaking informally with the teachers following classroom observations.

The two teachers selected for inclusion here taught the same grade and level of English in the district's middle school, but represent two contrasting approaches to the classroom and the teaching of English. In repeated observations of these two teachers' classrooms, significant differences emerged in their relations to students, their responses to linguistic and cultural difference in their classrooms, and their selection and handling of texts. (The third teacher would have fallen somewhere between the two on such criteria.) These differing dimensions of classroom practice were categories selected as particularly relevant for nonmainstream students, based on the educational research literature addressing issues around the treatment of cultural and linguistic difference in classrooms. The data examined below were drawn from field notes, conversations and interviews (both formal and informal), and transcripts from the teachers' classrooms. One of the teachers, Mrs. L., was very apprehensive about having her classroom or interviews taped, so that actual transcripts from her classes were only available for a three-week period toward the end of the school year. In some instances short dialogues from Mrs. L.'s classroom was constructed from in-depth field notes made during classroom observations. Transcripts from Mrs. T.'s classes, however, were available over a period of six months. Mrs. L. also never consented to being interviewed on tape, though we did have numerous informal conversations over the course of the school year. Thus the representation of the two teachers is necessarily unbalanced, and we as readers lack the depth of insight into Mrs. L.'s educational decisions that is afforded us with Mrs. T.'s greater openness. Mrs. L.'s teaching is included not as an equally insightful analysis into her decision-making processes, but rather because many of the practices found in her classroom have been typical of English classrooms in past decades and offer a point of contrast to Mrs. T.'s educational practices.

Let us now see how teachers' responses to students' language, styles of interaction, and the conservation or transformation of the curriculum can affect student participation in the learning process. The analysis focuses upon general patterns of student-teacher interaction, assumptions about textual authority, and treatment of language difference.

MRS. L.: AN OVERVIEW

Mrs. L., in her early fifties, comes from an Irish Catholic background and attended a private Catholic college to earn an M.A. in American Literature before entering teaching. Unlike many of the city's teachers, she is not originally from the area, nor does she reside in the community. She brings twenty-five years' experience and a traditional approach to her teaching of the English language arts. Traditionally she has been the teacher given the honors English class, because of her reputation for excellence in teaching honors students a literature-based curriculum. In recent years, however, her emphasis on grammar with her non-Regents students[5] has been called into question by the English supervisor. Mrs. L. feels that, as a senior member of the English faculty with a record of success in teaching Regents-level students over the years, she has been unjustly "attacked," and assumes a defensive posture regarding her continuing focus on grammar in classes below the honors level. (Mrs. L. was not routinely given non-Regents classes; during the year I observed her she indicated that this had been the first time in several years that she had been assigned lower-level students.) Mrs. L., like many teachers, was apprehensive about the potential for tapes of interviews or classroom interactions to "fall into the wrong hands," and refused to be taped throughout most of the school year;[6] in general her comments about teaching and her students were also much more guarded than those of Mrs. T., making it difficult for the researcher to have as much insight into reasons for the choices she made as an educator.

Mrs. L.'s classroom is teacher-centered, and Mrs. L. presides over it in the style of a stern but loving "elder," who on occasion jokes with students about the subject matter at hand. Throughout the school year students sit in straight rows, responding to her questions and directives from the front of the classroom; challenges to the classroom order and her authority are largely muted. While Mrs. L. despairs over students calling out without first being called upon, her major "problems" with her lower-track students are their failure to come to class with the appropriate materials, to study for tests, and to complete occasional homework assignments.

Analysis of classroom observations over the 1991–92 school year indicated that Mrs. L. generally emphasized form over process in student writing, selected from a traditional literary canon, and stressed knowledge about literature (literature terms, memorization of characters, author names, author intent, etc.) over student responses to literature. In her lower-track class she devoted most classroom instruction to reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary building, and spelling. Higher-track students, as she pointed out in after-class discussions, need less time on these areas because they already have the basic skills she feels are essential to successful

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[5] Students in New York State receive either a Regents-level diploma, which requires an approved sequence of courses and passing state regents exams, or a less demanding general diploma. Most secondary students are thus tracked into (at the minimum) regents or nonregents courses.

[6] Many teachers were very reticent to participate in such activities even when assured of anonymity, though most did ultimately agree to taping of interviews. Anecdotal evidence suggests such responses are not uncommon among teachers in general, who fear that such data could lead to them losing their jobs.

reading and writing.[7] Lower-track students in Mrs. L.'s class had few writing opportunities; because she felt it important that students use the "proper form" when writing essays, students were not assigned essay writing until January of the school year. At that point she introduced students to a standardized format, the popular "five-paragraph theme,"[8] to structure her writing assignments. When essay writing in the classroom did take place, it largely revolved around preparation for the New York State Preliminary Competency Test, which typically asks students to write a business letter, to organize facts provided them into a logical and coherent report, and to write a composition on a topic provided for them.

Classroom writing consisted largely of notetaking, copying work from the board, or filling in answers to questions discussed in class. Students kept a four-part notebook divided into (a) a section for spelling words, (b) a literature section with vocabulary lists and notes given in class on the reading selections, (c) a grammar section, and (d) a language skills section subdivided into topics such as alphabetizing, understanding analogies, and so on. Mrs. L.'s tests closely reflected what she taught in her classes and consisted largely of fill-in-the blank, matching, and short answer questions. A test brought closure to a discrete segment of classroom activities; in informal discussions with Mrs. L. she also indicated that a student's success on the test served as an indicator of the student's willingness to submit to the discipline needed for success in schools. Students overall had limited opportunities to see themselves as "writers"; to write extensively for communication in natural types of settings; or to bring their own experiences to their writing. As other classroom studies have amply documented, however, such a classroom environment is not uncommon across the nation (e.g., Goodlad, 1984; Langer & Applebee, 1986).

MRS. T.: AN OVERVIEW

Mrs. T. is a first-year (white) teacher in her mid-thirties who identifies strongly with students "on the margins," having herself had a troubled adolescence that contributed to her dropping out of high school at age seventeen. She vividly recollects the pain of having once been told by a teacher that she was a "moron" who would amount to nothing, and feels that high teacher expectations for nonmainstream students within a supportive educational environment are critical elements for student success. During student teaching she worked with a teacher well-known in state education circles for her excellence in developing a multicultural literature program and a learner-centered classroom that incorporates reader-response approaches to literature and emphasizes process writing. This experience, she asserts, "turned her [approach to classroom teaching as learned in college classrooms] around."

Student writing was encouraged from the outset in Mrs. T.'s classes. Unlike Mrs. L., who

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[7] These differences across tracks are common; see for instance findings in Oakes 1985; summary in Gehrke, Knapp and Sirotnik 1992.

[8] It consists of (a) an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement, (b) three paragraphs, each making a different point; and (c) a concluding paragraph. Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) posit that it lacks authenticity since teachers predetermine the type of response (e.g., three main points) expected.

spent thirty to forty minutes a week on spelling words, Mrs. T. did not make correct spelling an issue in her classroom, though she emphasized that final drafts be as free from spelling errors as possible. She herself was a poor speller, something she openly acknowledged and that students teased her about:

Mrs. T.: [soliciting names of the five New York City boroughs from students] Queens. [writes on board]

Mario: And Manhattan.

Carmen: Manhattan is so changed.

Mrs. T.: Manhattan's changed? Two *T*s in Manhattan? *E-N*?

S: *A-N.*

Mrs. T.: *A-N.*

S: Jeez, Ms. T., you're an English teacher and you can't spell.

Mrs. T.: So? I can't spell. That's no big thing.

Overemphasizing spelling and correct grammar, she felt, made students reluctant to try writing because of their fear of making errors. Improvements in writing, she believed, were more likely to grow out of increased exposure to the written word and correcting their own writing than memorizing spelling words or grammatical constructions in isolation from the written word. Grammar and spelling were addressed as they came up within individual students' writing (what Clay and Cazden [1990] metaphorically call "instructional detours"), rather than as a separate component of the program.

On occasion, Mrs. T. shared her own writing with the class, emphasizing that writing was a process, modeling the steps she herself took in arriving at a finished product, and explaining how she dealt with such problems as "writer's block." Students kept a journal, writing at times on topics of their own choosing, and at other times within a framework she provided (e.g., "Write about the most courageous thing you've ever done"). Students also practiced other kinds of writing in her classroom, such as tackling a research report, constructing a dialogue between two individuals of their choosing, and writing thank-you notes to speakers. Such assignments provided numerous opportunities for students to practice text conventions discussed in class, to use writing for communicative purposes, to bring their own experiences to their writing, and to draw upon literature discussed in the classroom. Mrs. T. felt that students were most likely to be interested in writing well when the writing had meaning for them. She would have liked to encourage students to write on current local issues, but avoided discussion or writing on the local debate about discrimination against minority students because of concern over possible repercussions for her tenure in the district.

CHOICES AND TREATMENT OF LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM: MRS. L.

Mrs. L. felt that her literature teaching over the years had suffered as a result of students' declining skills and motivation, and the imposition of standardized tests that required she "teach to the test." Her Regents-level students spent considerably more time on writing and literature than the non-Regents class, but even in her Regents classes she had recently stopped teaching her "prized heroes" unit to students because she felt they needed more time to master basic skills. Non-Regents literature selections included approximately a dozen short stories selected from literature anthologies; some were selections required for that particular grade and level, others she had selected by balancing her sense of what "classics" she felt students needed exposure to (e.g., *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* or *The Man Without a Country*) with her sense of which pieces were likely to hold student interest. With the exception of the two stories she read by the Puerto Rican author Nicholasa Mohr, in preparation for Mohr's visit to the school, all the selections but one (the play *The Diary of Anne Frank*) featured white male protagonists. In addition to the short stories, she also taught a poetry unit to students that focused on students being able to correctly identify aspects of poetry such as rhyme schemes, verses, stanzas, and figurative uses of language.

In reading literature with her classes, Mrs. L. "walked" students through the text as she rotated reading from one student to another. Questioning was typically to ascertain whether students understood the literature at a basic level. Literature discussions followed a pattern commonly found in classrooms, in which the teacher initiates a request for information, the student responds, and the conversational ball is returned to the teacher for teacher evaluation (e.g., Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990; Mehan, 1979). The result was that Mrs. L. initiated and controlled the direction of virtually all classroom talk; students called out short phrases or one-word answers, with the teacher either ignoring incorrect or unsolicited responses, asking another question in her search for the correct answer, or using the answer to connect to another question as she assessed student understanding of the text. Repeated observations of classrooms over the course of the school year revealed that knowledge was generally transmitted unidirectionally, with students cast in the role of "performers" (Lindfors, 1987) during classroom recitations. The following transcript illustrates a typical classroom pattern, with the teacher initiating the questions and students calling out brief responses:

Mrs. L.: This is from a Robert Frost called, poem excuse me, "The Road Not Taken." I've only got a few verses out of it for you [gesturing to poem written on board] but enough said so we can do it. It said, [reading from board] *Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.* Hmm. What does it mean to diverge? Two roads diverged in a wood.

S: They intersect together?

Mrs. L.: [drawing on board] Well they intersected or two roads sort of came together. Here You are, walking along the woods, and all of a sudden here's a little () path, and here's a road, and, there they are, and here's another one. "I took the one less

traveled by."

S: Fork in the road.

Mrs. L.: —and that has made all the difference. Which road do you take?

S: The right one.

Mrs. L: The right one, because it's what?

S: Less traveled.

Mrs. L: Less traveled by. Does the person seem happy with that person's decision?

S: No.

Mrs. L: Read the last verse. "And that has made all the difference."

S: Yes.

Mrs. L: Yes. The person is satisfied that he, or she did this. . . . [continues to explain that the poem can be understood at the literal level as being about a journey through the woods, but also at a symbolic level] Yes, this represents life. You can either go on the path of life which most people don't go on, or go where most people have gone. [pause] It's *dan*gerous to go any further than that gang. [Explains how one student interpreted the poem to be about a football player being at a party the night before a big football game where he expects to be scouted by a college, and the player has to decide whether or not to go along with the crowd and use drugs at the party.] [But] is there a football player in that? [gesturing to poem excerpt written on board]

S: Yeah, but if you think it's—

Ss: No, no they're just—

Mrs. L: No. That's reading too much into a poem.

As we see in the transcripts, student responses tended to be minimal, primarily focusing on attempts to ascertain the correct answer to questions initiated by the teacher. One consequence was that students were unable to create a conversational aperture in which to interject a challenge to the teacher's statements or to assert their own perspectives on the literature in question. Such discourse conventions are not unusual, as studies of lower-track English classrooms confirm:

> teachers working with the lower-track students orchestrated discussions in which their own role was central and in which their students' role was largely to provide brief answers to their questions. (Marshall, Klages, & Fehlman, 1990)

We see a similar response below in Mrs. L.'s handling of a "multicultural" text she incorporates into a lesson on poetry: close attention to the details of the text rather than to eliciting student responses to the literature or engaging students in critical thinking processes that might include exploration of how authors' biographies shape their texts, practices encouraged by those advocating the incorporation of multicultural literature into classrooms (e.g., Harris, 1992; Jordan & Purves, 1993; Purves, 1991):

[Teacher has been discussing the difference between simile and metaphor, asking students to identify phrases as one or the other; one of the phrases is "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair."]

Mrs. L.: The only thing I want you to consider as I'm reading [the poem from which this phrase is taken] is, what do you think about who is saying these words? No, I know it's me, that's not what I'm referring to. What I'm asking you, who is the narrator? What can you tell me about the narrator? The person who is speaking? That person says [reading from text]:

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

S: [calling out] Sounds like a grandfather.

Mrs. L.: What can you tell me about the *nar*rator? The speaker in this poem? What do you think?

S: Somebody down south.

Mrs. L.: Sounds like somebody down south. Right. What else can you tell me about this person speaking other than "somebody down south."

S: Old.

Mrs. L.: Somebody maybe old. Of course that's a relative term. What do you mean by "old"?

S: Old of age.

Mrs. L.: Old of age. [student and teacher laughter] Does old mean like 35? Old mean like 93?

S: No!

Mrs. L.: What are we talking about here?

S: I mean like a grandfather. A grandfather's telling these things.

Mrs. L.: Okay. Sixties, seventies, somewhere through there. Possibility.

S: A person who, a person who quit school or something.

Mrs. L.: You're saying a person that didn't go to school. Okay what are you basing that on?

S: He—how he sounds.

Mrs. L.: How the person is speaking, right. Using words that probably you would not use in educated language, right?

S: A person who's sort of, knocked up in life a little bit, doesn't want this person—a younger person—to do that.

Mrs. L.: Good. Someone who's speaking to a younger person. And this older person has had not a very easy life of it, and this person wants to make sure that this person keeps going on, and he's fighting, making sure that that person's life is going to be really good.

S: ()

Mrs. L.: What does that *tell* you about this *per*son? What can you tell me about the person that's speaking? I don't think we even mentioned what sex the person is although some of you may have caught on. Male or female?

Ss: Male/ Male/ Female

S: Unknown.

S: Who knows? Female.

Mrs. L.: I'm gonna read it one more time, and then you tell me. [Reads again]

S: It's a girl.

S: They called him "honey."

Mrs. L.: Okay. I think it's going to be more female, than male.

S: 'Cause fathers wouldn't call a boy "honey."

Mrs. L.: Okay. First verse said, "Well, son, I'll tell you." Now, we could interpret this one of two ways. When the person says "son." What am I talking about?

S: The son being the boy.

Mrs. L.: Could be actually biological, the son of this older person. Right? Okay? Or, some people speak in terms of, "Well son," I'm sure you've had older people do that to you. And you're not even biologically related to this person. However, there seems to be such a closeness between these two individuals, it seems to be that they are related. Um, and now with regard to the sex of this individual, male or female, somebody mentioned the word—

S: honey

Mrs. L.: Right. Is this—is this going to be a male or female speaking?

S: Male.

Ss: Female/female.

S: How can you tell?

Mrs. L.: To the young person as "honey?"

S: You never know.

Mrs. L.: [speaking over student voices] Where down there it says, "For I'se still goin', honey." Now we assume that this person, the young person's not like five or six.

S: How old?

Mrs. L.: The person's probaby gonna be a bit older than that.

S: Thirteen.

Mrs. L.: Why am I saying that? Gotta be at least 13, early teens, right? Why? What has the person wanted to do, that this older person is trying to break the person out of?

S1: Climbing up a tree.

S2: [laughs]

S1: [defensively] What?

Mrs. L.: Trying to do what in reference to life? [Pause] Jack? Trying to do what [students laugh at his being chosen] in reference to life?

J: Um, go on in life?

Mrs. L.: That's what the person does *not* want to do. The older person is trying to bring the person out of it, trying to make that person go on. [brief pause] This poem is entitled, *Mother to Son* people, not *Father to Son*, but—*Mother to Son*. It's written by Langston Hughes, and this is, Langston Hughes is a very popular, up-to-date black writer. He writes in all genres of literature. Short stories. He's written poems, he's written novels, he's written essays, things for newspapers, all kinds of things. Um, so once again, we'll have more, review on figures of speech before you take any test, but these are an important parts of your notes. Speaking of notes—

Again we see classroom discourse controlled by the teacher, whose focus throughout the lesson is on moving students toward a "right" answer, practices that act to exclude students' knowledges and perspectives (Langer & Applebee, 1986). Unasked were the sorts of questions that affirm students as capable of "making meaning" and critical thinking, for instance asking them to relate the poem to their own lives, to speculate on how the author's background might be relevant in understanding the poem, to understand why the author of the poem chose to use "uneducated" English, or to consider whether the two characters might themselves represent a larger struggle.

While Mrs. L. did not routinely incorporate multicultural literature into her literature curriculum, the political climate was such during the 1991–92 school year that she did alter her usual selections. In response to the local conflict over the schooling of Hispanic students, the school district arranged for Nicholasa Mohr, a popular author whose books reflect her experiences growing up Puerto Rican in New York City, to speak to students. Mrs. L. had earlier indicated to the researcher that she felt Mohr's stories were "particularistic," and not likely to appeal to non-Puerto Rican students. When Mrs. L. learned that others were reading selections from Mohr's books with their classes (after asking the researcher whether all the other grade-level English teachers had incorporated Mohr's literature into their classes) she also decided to read aloud to her class two of Mohr's short stories, *Once Upon a Time . . .* and *The Wrong Lunch Line* (Mohr, 1986a).

The Wrong Lunch Line, set in New York city in 1946, recounts the story of two high school students, one Puerto Rican (Yvette) and one Jewish (Mildred), who are close friends. Yvette, eligible for free school lunches, is invited by Mildred to go through a special Passover lunch line set up for the Jewish students. Mildred is attempting to explain to Yvette's Puerto Rican friends why they eat that particular combination of foods (matzo, no milk and meat together, etc.) when a teacher approaches Yvette and singles her out in front of other students, demanding to know whether she is Jewish and should be eating the Jewish students' lunch. Yvette is called to the office, and later Mildred and Yvette are left feeling too uncomfortable to talk directly about the incident. The story closes with the following dialogue:

> *"Boy, that Mrs. Ralston* [the teacher who humiliated Yvette] *sure is dumb," Yvette said, giggling. They looked at each other and began to laugh loudly.*
>
> *"Old dumb Mrs. Ralston," said Mildred, laughing convulsively. "She's scre . . . screwy."*
>
> *"Yeah," Yvette said, laughing so hard tears began to roll down her cheeks. "Dop . . . dopey . . . M . . . Mi . . . Mrs. Ra . . . Ral . . . ston . . ."*

Mrs. L read the story straight through, interjecting comments at two points:

Mrs L: [reading from text] *Yvette lived on the top floor of a tenement, in a four-room apartment which she shared with her parents, grandmother, three older sisters, two younger brothers, and baby sister.* [pauses briefly] Good grief!

Her second comment came shortly before the end of the story:

Mrs. L.: [Reading from text] *"Boy, that Mrs. Ralston is dumb," Yvette said, giggling.* [breaking off from text] Now here's the part where I don't agree with the author. I think it would have been better if she had left it off right about here. [Continues reading to end of story.] [Long pause] I didn't get the ending.

S: That's the ending?

Mrs. L: That's the ending. I think it was stronger before it got to this part. What message is the author trying to say to you?

[Brief exchange, teacher brings out point that Yvette is being judged by the way she looks, and adds that similar conflicts exist in the city today between Blacks and Jews, and Blacks and Hispanics.]

Sonia (Puerto Rican): You know, the Jewish people wash with vinegar, and when they go by you they smell.

Mrs. L: Now who's being discriminatory?

Mrs. L. appeared flustered by the turn of the conversation. With only a few minutes left in the class she abruptly dropped discussion of the story and asked students to take out their notebooks and participate in an unrelated rhyming exercise for the remaining class time.

Three points bear mentioning here. We may first ask what the "hidden curriculum" conveyed in the above classroom scene might be. Mrs. L. responds to the description of Yvette's living situation by following it with the parenthetical interjection "Good grief!" Yet the scenario Nicholasa Mohr incorporates into her story is certainly not unusual among working-class Puerto Ricans in New York City (nor in Arnhem): a large extended family in cramped living quarters. Her comment marks the scene as exceptional and implicitly undesirable. Given that five of her students in the classroom were from working-class Puerto Rican families, and that a strong correlation exists between social class and tracking—students from working class families are more likely to be in lower tracks—we can assume that some of her students are now, or have at one time, lived in similar situations. For middle-class students, the implicit message is the "otherness" of the experiences of their poorer peers; for working-class students, the comment affirms their "otherness" without recourse to understanding the roots of class differentiation, shared immigrant experiences, or the strengths that may accompany such residential patterns, such as strong family ties. Mrs. L. also circumvents an opportunity to address students' stereotypes when she avoids taking up discussion of Sonia's comment on Jews. Mrs. L. responds by saying "Now who's being discriminatory?" in a disapproving tone of voice, but silences any possibility of talk about the topic by switching to a totally unrelated classroom exercise.[9]

Mohr's story could provide an opportunity for students to reflect on similar situations (close friendships, discomfort talking about painful subjects, learning about customs of others that differ from those of your family, etc.). The conversational exchange in the story between Jewish students and Yvette's friends about religious dietary customs offers opportunities to discuss cultural differences, similar rules in other religions, and so forth. Mrs. L. also misses an

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[9]In this instance I did not have the opportunity after class to question Mrs. L. about her decision to quickly move away from Sonia's comment; however, in an earlier observation, when I asked her why she had ignored a white male student's unsolicited comment "Freed the niggers" (said under his breath but loud enough for some students to hear it), she had indicated that she was unwilling to "create a conflict" in the classroom by drawing attention to it. See Bigler & Collins (1995) for further explication of the event.

opportunity to encourage students to form and support their own positions on the quality of the ending and the story.

CHOICES AND TREATMENT OF LITERATURE IN THE CLASSROOM: MRS. T.

Mrs. T. is a strong advocate for multicultural literature selections in the English classroom, and criticizes traditional selections used by many district teachers for their overwhelming preponderance of white male protagonists. She had entered the school district already familiar with debates about the literary canon (from her student-teaching experience), and was the teacher responsible for arranging Nicholasa Mohr's visit to the school. During the school year she attended workshops on multicultural literature, whole language learning, and process writing.

Mrs. T.'s selection of texts for her students was made partly in response to her growing awareness of the ethnic and generational conflict in the larger community during which the Puerto Rican population was publicly disparaged. She believes that multicultural texts provide an effective means to explore cultural differences, reduce student prejudices, and positively affirm the diversity inherent in the student population. Mrs. T. began the school year with a thematic approach, exploring through literature selections from diverse groups what it means to be "American" with her students. In preparation for Nicholasa Mohr's visit, she also read and discussed several of the author's works with her students.

Mrs. T. devoted class time to "walking" students through literature by having them read aloud, at times assessing students' understandings through the typical set of discourse conventions Mrs. L. used in her classroom (teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation), particularly when reviewing information covered in previous class discussions. Mrs. T. also encouraged students to bring their own experiences and voices into the classroom literature discussions. She frequently began such classes by arranging students in a discussion circle, where she joined them at one of the student desks rather than standing at the head of the classroom. Classroom discourse more often approximated what Tharp and Gallimore (1989) term an "instructional" conversation: Students were more likely to ask questions, introduce their own experiences into the discussion, and respond to one another's comments. Questions were often open-ended, with no one correct answer. When students did ask questions or make an evaluative statement (even when unsupported by the text), their conversational overtures, as we see below, were accepted and given consideration. Students would then be asked to support their statements, or to examine the text to find out if "textual evidence" supported or contra[illegible]ted their statements, as we see in their discussion of Mohr's short story *The New Window Display*:

Mrs. T.: [asking students to speculate on why the parents might want to take Little Ray, who is extremely ill, from New York City back to Puerto Rico, where he was born] Mario?

Mario: 'Cause it's warm over there. That's the advantage of being over there when it's all warm and not when it's cold.

Jerry: I know one.

Mrs. T.: Okay so you're saying the weather might be better for him. For whatever his ailment is. Jerry?

Jerry: Because there's not a lot of factories so there's not as much pollution.

Mrs. T.: Okay that's another good point. So the air is—

Jerry: Clearer.

Mrs. T.: So the air is clearer than here. And Matt?

Matt: He's in his own country.

Mrs. T.: Well then, that's interesting. Okay you're saying that then maybe he's become ill because—

Matt: ()

Mrs. T.: I didn't hear it yesterday. I never heard that.

Jerry: [challenging Matt's inference that Little Ray will get better faster if he is "home"] Yeah, but it says that he didn't want to go back [looking through text].

Mrs. T.: That he didn't want to leave?

Jerry: Yeah, remember it said that he didn't like that idea at all?

Mrs. T.: Okay, that's pretty observant of you, Jerry, because if the text says, if the text actually says, that that's not the reason, then that's not the reason. We have to go by what it says here. So if they say Little Ray doesn't want to go back to Puerto Rico, then your [referring to Matt] comment about him being homesick isn't true, because it says so. Mario, what were you going to say?

Rather than testing students' knowledge of why Little Ray's family plans on returning him to Puerto Rico at the end of the story, Mrs. T. models the kinds of questions a proficient reader being drawn into the story might ask, and encourages students to develop reasonable hypotheses and test them against the text as they move through it. Because there is no one right answer, students can generate several responses and end up considering a broader realm of possibilities. While Mrs. T. could have pointed out immediately to Matt that the text contradicts his statement, she puts it "on the floor" to be examined. Another student is able to point out the contradictory evidence in the text, possibly contributing to his own sense of empowerment in his encounters

with literature.

Rather than teach writing conventions (quotations, ellipses, blank spaces, etc.) in isolation, Mrs. T. also used her discussions of literature to illustrate how authors used such conventions successfully in their writing, as we see below. In the process she fostered students' skills in interpreting the written text and provided them with conventions they could transfer to their own writing:

Mrs. T.: Look at the way they change paragraphs.

David: I don't know what you call that. There, you see, that space—

Mrs. T.: It's what Matt—

S: () Some ones are bigger than the other.

S: No it's less () and stuff.

David: It's spaced—

Mrs. T.: Yes, David, yes. People, look at. There's white space there. You call that white space. It's a technique that authors use—Fred—it's a technique that authors use, either to show a change in time, a change in location, lots of different changes can be made by just using white space. Now what kind of change has occurred here since you said "absolutely," to the sentence that you just read?

S: ()

S: He died.

Mrs. T.: Would you say time has passed?

S: Yes.

Mrs. T.: How do you know that?

Matt: Because it says it's been a whole month.

S: It says a whole month.

Mrs. T: Yeah, a whole month. A big space of time has passed. Notice in the other paragraphs when they change to another paragraph there isn't that big space of time, is there? Things are just continuing. The kids are talking, they're talking about their friends, time is going on and on and on. All in one particular time

frame. All the sudden a whole month passed, and Nicholasa Mohr shows us a whole month has passed just by using the technique of white space, it's a transition.

David: That—that—that could have been how he died, and um so forth, then. So that's why they spaced it out, instead of going through all that stuff. Like I did with my story. With my baseball thing. Instead of going, "Each inning, each inning," I put it to "The eighth inning was tied."

Mrs. T: Yeah, you used transitional words. Right. Like "the next day," or "the next inning." Those are transitions. But another kind of transition is when you leave a big space.

In reading literature, students were encouraged to bring their own experiences to the texts (without abandoning attention to the text itself). Mrs. T.'s selection and handling of several stories by Nicholasa Mohr, as we see in the following selection, provided opportunities for Puerto Rican students to act as "cultural interpreters" for other students, in which they contributed to building understanding of the text. Ethnic and linguistic differences were handled in a matter-of-fact manner, and her Puerto Rican students appeared comfortable discussing such matters:

Fred: [reading from *The Window Display* by Nicholasa Mohr (1986a); Little Ray has recently arrived in New York City from Puerto Rico] *Little Ray was always with Papo, who had to look after him. In the four months since he had arrived, he had become the group's favorite. At first he had spoken no English, but now he was almost fluent. He spoke with an accent, which amused the other children, and he would get back at them by correcting their Spanish.*

Mrs. T: Okay, does that make sense?

Ss: Yeah / Uh huh

Mrs. T: He's learned Spanish, he's picked it up rather—or, English—and he's picked it up rather quickly, but of course he has the accent, and sometimes that—

David (Puerto Rican): What accent?

Mrs. T: A little Spanish accent. Wherever you come from, you bring with you, the one—

Mario (Puerto Rican): [addressing David] You know how you—

Carmen (Puerto Rican): ()

Mario: Sometimes your grand—my grandmother, my grandmother says, instead of

"yellow" she says "jellow."

Carmen: [chuckling] Yeah.

Mrs. T: You know something, sometimes you say "jes" instead of "yes," you say "jes." Now why is that Mario?

S: 'Cause he sits near Jessica.

Ss: [laughter]

Mrs. T: No, why is that?

David: ()

Mario: 'Cause it happens to me, 'cause it just happens the "y" gets pronounced as a "j".

Carmen: Instead of saying "something" they go "some sings," like—

Mario: Some sings, some sings.

Carmen: Yeah. Some *seeng*.

S: Yeah.

Mario: Some *seeng*.

Mrs. T: Well it's just a little bit of a difference that you take from your native language into another um, into another language, and you have a little trouble making the—the switches. I know I'm not being too clear. In every language—in Spanish and English—the languages aren't equivalent all the time. Remember we talked about the "how" Carmen?

Carmen: [nodding] Yeah.

Mrs. T.: Like you would say (in Spanish), "How is your school like?" instead of "What is your school like?" Just little switches, in the language, that just make it a little bit amusing to that person listening to you. Okay? So if I would—sometimes I find it a little amusing when I hear that. But I might say things in Spanish, that would make you laugh very hard. [Students laugh]

S: Like what?

Mrs. T: Like not—

Mario: Like um—you don't have the accent that we do.

Mrs. T: Well like my, my friend says, "The fingers ( ) my toes." And of course in English, "the fingers of my feet." And in English we call them toes. *Dedos de mi manos*, right? How do you say feet, *pies* [PIES]?

Carmen: Yeah, *pies* [PEEAYS].

Mario: *Pies* [PEEAYS]. Making pies.

David: Pizza [PEEAY-ZA] pie.

Mrs. T: So it's just a language switch that doesn't con—that doesn't parallel.

As the transcript illustrates, students eagerly offered examples from their own experiences growing up in a bilingual community that regularly moves back and forth between English and Spanish (Zentella, 1981). Mrs. T. has previously explained that she is taking Spanish lessons, and wants to work toward being bilingual; she thus presents herself as a learner, and makes clear that she views students' bilingualism as a strength. Her Puerto Rican students—whom some would label "language deficient"—incorporate a sophisticated play on words into their classroom discourse, making a bilingual joke of the differences between the pronunciation in Spanish and in English of the word *pies*. Carmen tactfully corrects Mrs. T.'s mispronunciation of the Spanish word *pies*, affirming that she has the right word and modeling the correct pronunciation. They talk comfortably about language usage that in other contexts might have been marked as "deficient."

In reading Nicholasa Mohr's stories, Carmen and other Puerto Rican students also became, like Little Ray in *The New Window Display*, the experts and final arbiters on Spanish pronunciations and translation, as we see below:

Jerry: [reading from text] *"To our dear departed Uncle Felix," Hannibal read, "from his loving niece and husband and children—"* [pauses, clears throat, unsure of pronunciation of Spanish names Rojelia and Esteban]

Ss: [giggling at his hesitation]

Mario: Carmen says she'll try that name.

Mrs. T: Yeah, Carmen, help him out.

Carmen: [pronouncing with Spanish accent] Rojelia.

Jerry: And—Esteban? [voice trailing off]

Mario: [correcting pronunciation] Esteban.

Jerry: [continues reading from text] *Esteban Martinez, and Gilberto, Maria, Patricia, and—Consuelo*?

Mrs. T: Uh huh.

Jerry: *Para un gran amigo.* I don't know. [makes a funny face, other students giggle]

Mrs. T: Which means what?

Jerry: I have absolutely no idea.

Mrs. T: You don't take Spanish Jerry?

Mario: For a grand friend, for a grand friend.

Jerry: I don't take any language. [continuing from text] *Joey read from another wreath. Felix. Umberto*?

Mrs. T: Carmen or Mario, help him out.

Mario: Umberto.

Carmen: Umberto Cordero.

Jerry: [can't pronounce the Spanish words]

Carmen: *De la familia Jiménez.*

Jerry: Thank you. [continues reading] *Five oh, fifty thirteen Kelly Street, Bronx, New York.*

Puerto Rican students' comfort serving as "cultural interpreters" was also evident in classroom discussions of cultural practices:

Mrs. T.: [reading from *A New Window Display*, which describes a picture of the children's friend Little Ray, as he appeared in his casket] *His dark curly hair was oiled and combed and parted.* So he's looking his best.

S (Euro-American male): Oiled?? Why do they make him look nasty?

Mrs. T.: Now Mario [addressing Puerto Rican student] you put baby oil on your hair to make it look shiny, right?

Mario: I used to.

Carmen (Puerto Rican): That ruins your hair.

Mrs. T.: It makes it—Does it?

Mario: That messes it up.

Mrs. T.: Why? Your hair always looks so shiny.

Carmen: ()

Mario: I put () on it.

Mrs. T.: I see.

Mario: I stopped because it messes it up. It makes it dry—

Mrs. T.: It makes it dry?

S: It all falls out—

Mrs. T.: Well, realistically, Little Ray [the character in the story] will never have to worry about that, will he?

When a student expresses disgust at the idea of putting oil on Little Ray's hair, Mrs. T. invites students to move from an evaluative judgment ("Why do they make him look nasty?") toward a position of cultural relativism, to recognize it as a different, but not inferior, culturally specific practice among some Puerto Rican male students. In talking about the difference, she also creates a space for Mario to modify her own assumptions.

The environment Mrs. T. created in her classroom was such that her Puerto Rican students even appeared comfortable joking about negative public stereotypes and images of Latinos, including the claim that had recently been advanced by local outspoken senior citizens that Latinos were swarming in droves to the city and threatening its well-being. In Nicholasa Mohr's short story *Mr. Mendelsohn* (1986a), an elderly Jewish man (Mr. Mendelsohn) is befriended by his neighbors, the Suárez family. Mr. Mendelsohn grows fond of his neighbors' children, and tells them stories about "the good old days" in New York City when he was young. Mrs. T. asks students if they have ever asked older people about the past, or if they know older people who talk about the "good old days." Several students respond with the stories their grandparents or parents repeat, and Mario, a Puerto Rican student who had participated in the

first-day school boycott to bring attention to the needs of minority students, joins in:

Mrs. T.: So have you ever heard a child asking someone about what things were like in their day?

Mario: Yes, I used to do it.

Mrs. T.: Okay, tell me about who you asked. Who did you ask?

Mario: My grandfather.

Mrs. T.: You asked your grandfather what?

S: How old he was.

Mrs. T.: Let Mario finish.

Mario: How it was in New York City.

Mrs. T.: How it was in New York City? And what did he tell you?

Mario: [jokingly] There was a lot of Hispanics.

Ss: [laughing]

Mario: No, he said it was a lot peacefuller there.

Mrs. T.: It was more peaceful—there wasn't as much crime maybe as there is now?

Mrs. T., unlike many of the teachers, was aware of and did not ignore racist or derogatory comments students made about various groups, a possibility enhanced by the introduction of literature that included characters from varied ethnic and racial backgrounds. She encouraged students to think about how they might feel being the victims of prejudice and discrimination, and to recognize their own stereotypes. She also talked openly with them about how she had felt encountering people's stereotypes about teenage dropouts, and asked students to reflect on similar experiences through their journal writing.

In such an environment students themselves pointed out comments or actions they felt were indicative of prejudiced attitudes, as the following excerpt illustrates. Mrs. T. has asked students to predict what the children in *A New Window Display* (Mohr 1986a) will see when they walk up to the funeral parlor window (a regular routine of theirs, where they observe the numbers of wreaths people receive and read and comment on the messages on the wreaths). Note Carmen and Mario's responses (both are Puerto Rican) to David's innuendos about Puerto Ricans. (David's mother was Puerto Rican and his stepfather white. In classroom conversations he did

sometimes make subtle disparaging comments about Puerto Ricans.)

Tom: He's gonnna see a whole bunch of pictures up in the window.

Mrs. T.: A whole bunch of pictures of Little Ray in the storefront window. Okay there's one prediction. What do you predict?

S: The same thing.

Mrs. T.: And you?

Ss: Same thing/Same thing.

David: Me.

Mrs. T.: What do you predict?

David: I don't think he's gonna be on there, because he's not that popular. The flowers and stuff like that. He won't even take a picture of him because he's not that popular.

Mrs. T.: Who's not popular?

David: Ray.

S: He is.

Mrs. T.: He certainly is.

David: No, the whole world don't care about him.

Ss: [overlapping]

Mrs. T.: But now wait a minute, that's an interesting point that David has. He may be popular, you're right, he—

David: He's popular to his friends but not to anyone else.

Mrs. T.: He's right.

S: Maybe his friends took pictures.

David: You see, you see, what do you know?

S: And sent a lot of flowers.

Mrs. T.: Now remember, the amount of flowers that gets to a person during their wake has to do with how wealthy their family is, because certainly people have to afford these.

David: And I don't think Little Ray's family is rich, because they live in Puerto Rico.

Carmen: (Puerto Rican, moves back and forth between the island and mainland frequently): [emphatically] *So*? That don't mean nothing.

David: Yes it does.

Carmen: No it doesn't!

David: Yes it does!

Carmen: No it doesn't!

Ss: [overlap]

Mrs. T.: Wait a minute, wait a minute, we're getting loud. I'll tell you what we'll do—

Carmen: [angrily] It don't mean you're rich because you [live here?].

David: He's not rich because his family comes from Puerto Rico and he's living in New York State.

Ss: [overlapping]

Mrs. T.: Children, we don't want to fight here, we can debate. Let's do a raise of hands. No one talk while the person whose hand's raised. Jennie. Listen now. Listen now. Listen. Listen. Listen.

David: I'm sure so leave me alone.

Mrs. T.: Anyone who has their hand raised may speak, okay? But do not interrupt that person while they're talking. Mario.

Mario: It says, "Many neighbors had attended the funeral mass." So that makes him more.

David: No it doesn't.

Ss: Yes it does/ It does.

Mrs. T.: Now let me write that on the board. It says, "Many people—"

S: Many neighbors.

David: What are neighbors but a whole bunch of people.

Mrs. T.: Many neighbors attended. All right, that's textual evidence that a lot of people were at the wake.

S: Family.

Mrs. T.: Is that your point now. Okay so you have a textual point you found something in the writing that says that many people went to that wake. David. You have a point to make?

David: Yes.

Mrs. T.: So what is your point?

David: That just because neighbors went that don't mean the whole world knows that he—he's not popular, he's just a little, like, street kid.

Jennie: [a student frequently absent from school, a local "street kid"] So, you can be popular.

Mrs. T.: So, you're right, you're right.

David: So if I go out and steal and stuff and I do all that stuff I'm popular because I do that kind of stuff?

S: To the police you are.

S: (?)

David: And because I'm out on the streets?

Jennie: People know you—

Ss: [overlapping]

Mrs. T.: Raise your hands. Raise your hands. Okay. Now we're not talking about criminal

activity. We're talking about popularity and who gets more flowers.

David: But his picture won't be up there because he's not popular.

S: How do you know? How do you know?

David: Because I know, by reading the story.

Mrs. T.: Shhh.

David: By reading the story, by reading the story.

Mrs. T.: Okay, let somebody say something else, David. Okay Carmen.

Carmen (Puerto Rican): This don't have nothing to do with this but I just want to know why does David always have to be talking about Puerto Ricans when he's a Puerto Rican?

S: Well how is he—

David: You're right, it has nothing to do with this.

Carmen: So why you always have to be talking about us if you're one of us?

David: You're right it has nothing to do with this.

Mrs. T.: Calm down, calm down. Carmen, what do you mean? What is he saying about Puerto Ricans?

Carmen: He's always talking about things.

Mario (Puerto Rican): He's always putting us down.

Carmen: That we're always getting in trouble, that just because we're Puerto Ricans we don't have money.

Mario: Yeah, like he just said that he steals—if he goes out and steals—he's not going to be popular and all.

Mrs. T.: You see, I didn't catch that. Now he said that they steal—

Mario: He's always putting us down.

Mrs. T.: Did he mean Puerto Ricans?

S: (?)

David: I just said—

Carmen: You meant Puerto Ricans.

Ss: (?)

David: Street kids I meant.

Mrs. T.: You meant just street kids. Not Puerto Rican children?

David: Yeah ().

Mrs. T.: Okay, he's clarified what he meant okay? You did not mean Puerto Rican kids, you meant kids.

David: Yeah, I just meant street kids.

Mrs. T.: Okay, you should clarify that. Because Carmen took it the wrong way. Okay . . . Carmen, did you have another point to make about this?

Carmen: [shakes her head]

Carmen's family moved back and forth between the island and the mainland; her and Mario's responses to David's statement that Little Ray's family can't be rich because they come from Puerto Rico and to his implication that Puerto Ricans steal, speaks to their awareness of and sensitivity to negative stereotypes in the community. Rather than ignoring the comment, Mrs. T. provides Carmen an opportunity to voice her concern and David an opportunity to explain himself, subtly putting him on notice that such statements are inappropriate.

Mrs. T., then, uses multicultural literature to draw upon students' experiences and to explore and affirm their differing cultural backgrounds. Students often responded in unanticipated ways to such literature: Mrs. T. for instance recounted an incident in her classroom in which one of her Puerto Rican students (one of the few in a Regents-level class) who had said nothing in class all year excitedly explained to the entire class what a *coqui* (a small frog found in the rainforests of Puerto Rico) was when the word came up in a story. The subsequent day, the student came in wearing a T-shirt from Puerto Rico with a picture of a *coqui* on the front of it.

Excerpts from thank-you notes[10] written to Nicholasa Mohr by Puerto Rican students in

[10] Excerpts are taken from preliminary drafts, and do not reflect any later spelling corrections or changes in sentence structure.

Mrs. T.'s class after her visit to the school suggest the significance of including literature written by non-mainstream authors for students typically considered "at risk":

> *Felita* [1979] was enjoyable. It reminded me of when I used to live in N.Y. city And the story with "Mr. Mendelson" was very touching. It was very funny to. You made me love him then he died. You did that in another story with Little Ray. I'm Puerto Rican to and you make me more intersted, because you are to. You the first Puerto Rican writer I heard of.
>
> I read one of your books. The book that I read was *Felita*. I really liked it. I know that I liked it because that was the only book that I ever read. That was the only book that I read because I know how it feels. I liked your book so much that I bought *Going Home* [1986b].
>
> What I really liked is that you are Puerto Rican. Why? Because I grew up here, and I grew up hearing that any hispanic growing up in the U.S, or just living hear, didn't have any chance. After seeing you I thought they were wrong.

At the same time these stories were not marked as stories about, or stories exclusively for, minority children. Mrs. T. encouraged students to see universal themes in the stories, and to draw upon their own experiences in making sense of the characters. Thus, for instance, she asked them what "stories" older family members passed down about "the good old days," or to write on what they would miss most about a relationship if someone close to them were no longer in their lives (as in *The New Window Display*, in which Little Ray dies). Thank-you notes to Nicholasa Mohr written by non-Hispanic students indicate that they too were able to identify with her characters and their experiences:

> When you read *Isabel and her New Mother* that is what kinda happend to me because I got a stepfather. It took me 3 yrs to get use to him. Did that happen to you? In *Shoes for Hector* that happen to me. My mother got me sandal shoes and I hated them. One time I almost through them in the garbag. When I read your stories it seems like it has already happened to me.
>
> Your stories are really fun to read because they are about kids our own age and we can kind of relate to them and what they deal with each day of their life. In the story *A New Window Display* when little Ray died, I could kind of relate to it because my cousin died and I felt almost the same way the kids did.

But it is important to recognize that, while incorporating more multicultural selections into the classroom has been viewed as a mechanism for introducing all students to the diversity of the United States and enhancing minority children's self-esteem and academic engagement as they see themselves in their texts (cf. selections in Harris, 1992; Lindgren, 1991), introducing such literature into the classroom does not in and of itself achieve such objectives. Mrs. L., as noted

above, was uncomfortable with stories that opened up the possibility of discussing cultural and class differences. Her brief comment on Yvette's crowded living quarters without further explication carries a message that we can assume was not intended by the author. Multicultural literature, as we saw earlier, also opens up more possibilities for students to introduce their own learned prejudices into classroom discussions.

Mrs. T.'s interactional style[11] with her students was also not without risk. Providing numerous openings for students to interject their comments meant that students could more easily disrupt the flow of conversation around the text. Three of her male students on occasion used the opportunity to "get a rise" out of the teacher or other students, testing the lines between what were appropriate and inappropriate comments. In Mrs. L.'s class, such distractions were unlikely to occur. Students could not, for instance, sit with their friends or move out of their seats once the bell rang, and the types of questions asked in class limited their opportunities to "wisecrack" with the class. While some students called out answers without first being recognized by the teacher, they were few in number and the length of the response was generally shorter.

Mrs. T.'s students also frequently responded simultaneously to her questions, or to statements made by other students. Mrs. T. accepted such events so long as students did not extend their simultaneous outpouring of responses. Despite their potential to interrupt the flow of the classroom conversation, the presence of such events signified that students were actively following and involved in the classroom discussion rather than passively attending to what was going on in the class.

LANGUAGE ISSUES: MRS. L.

As noted above, Mrs. L. stressed grammar in her classroom and frequently incorporated grammar worksheets into her classroom lessons. In the process of attempting to encourage her students to use standard English she also disparaged students' nonstandard English:

Example #1.

Mrs. L.: [handing back a test on present and past participles] Shame on you individuals that gave me "brang" and "brung!"

Example #2.

Mrs. L.: [going over worksheet on selecting the appropriate verb form for each sentence] This is the one I cringe at: "I *seen* that movie last week."

Example #3.

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[11] Her style paralleled more closely the participation structure McCollum (1989) found in Puerto Rican classrooms. Unlike North American classrooms, where recitation lessons are common, McCollum found "instructional conversations" to be the norm in the classes she observed on the island. She posits that the differing classroom participation structures found in most mainland classrooms may contribute to interactive difficulties between teachers and Puerto Rican students.

Mrs. L.: [reading aloud from Nicholasa Mohr's short story, "Once Upon a Time"] *"What do you think?" asked the second girl. "Should we tell somebody what we seen* [a dead body]*?"*
[Teacher addressing class, in an astonished tone of voice] Seen?
[Continues reading] *". . . We better not; then they'll ask us what we was doing up on the roof and all," said the first girl.*

Mrs. L.: [addressing class] These kids haven't had Mrs. L.'s grammar class yet.

The comment on the characters' English was meant to introduce a note of levity into the class, but it also in the process communicates to nonmainstream students that there is something inherently flawed with the way English is spoken in their communities. The text could instead be used as an opportunity to explore issues around language usage in different contexts.

Mrs. L. also indicated in informal discussion with the researcher that she disapproved of the common practice of Hispanic students using Spanish among themselves when in school; such practices, she felt, kept students from mastering the English language. She appeared uncomfortable with the inclusion of Spanish terms in English reading materials. The two selections she read from Nicholasa Mohr's work did not have any Spanish language passages in them (though many that she might have chosen did). When she did encounter a Spanish term in reading aloud a biographical sketch of Nicholasa Mohr's childhood to her class, she stopped at the word *barrio* and pointed to her two Hispanic students to ask them to guess at what the missing word was:

Mrs. L.: [reading aloud] *Nicholasa Mohr was born in Manhattan, where she grew up in El —?—.* [Teacher pauses] The word begins with "B." [pointing to the two Hispanic students in the classroom] You Hispanic students have some insights here? [No response from two students. Long pause] *Barrio. She grew up in El Barrio.*

We can not know why her students, who in fact were bilingual, did not respond. It is possible their lack of responsiveness to her question soliciting the word *barrio* may indicate their fear of guessing at the sought-after answer, or possibly their discomfort at being singled out in a context in which bilingualism and ethnicity had previously been neither acknowledged nor viewed as valuable classroom resources.

Mrs. L., through her treatment of the English spoken by her working-class and minority students, her choice and treatment of texts, and her emphasis on the importance of school knowledge without acknowledging students' knowlege— a "banking" model of education (Freire, 1970) in which the teacher's role is to transmit knowledge to students—creates an environment in which nonmainstream students' lives, languages, and knowledges are excluded or marginalized. In the process students rarely had opportunities to talk about their own lives in the classroom and to draw upon knowledge learned outside the classroom; Mrs. L. in turn had little opportunity to learn about their world beyond the school doors. Other students also in the process lacked opportunities to explore similarities and differences among themselves.

LANGUAGE ISSUES: MRS. T.

As noted above, Mrs. T. incorporated Spanish into classroom talk and valued students' bilingual skills. She also refused to make student use of the vernacular an issue in student writing and talk, pointing out to students that in certain contexts—talking with friends, writing dialogue, and so forth—use of the vernacular was the language of choice:

S: [reading from text] "*I guess then they—I guess they are really— are real late. Or they ain't coming. We better split or we are* going—*are gonna be late," said Hannibal.*

Ms. T: Okay, Fred—

Mario: "Gonna" and "ain't," are not words, you know that?

Mrs. T.: Pardon me?

Mario: "Gonna" and "ain't," they're not words.

Ms. T: But she's using them how in this piece of writing Mario? Why are they okay in this?

David: They're Puerto Rican people.

Ms. T: Nooo.

Mario: No, that's how we speak. That's how everybody speaks.

Mrs. T.: Remember when you were doing stories and we used these? [draws quotation marks on board] What are those?

David: Quotions [sic]. Quotes.

S: Quotations.

Ms. T: Quotation marks. So if you're putting the writing inside, and that's what the person said, then that's okay, even if they say "gonna." All right? If it's inside the quota—

Mario: But "gonna"'s not a word.

S: Gonna, gonna.

Ms. T: But the person *said* it. Now Mario, if you said to me, "I'm gonna go to the store, I'm gonna go to the store," right—

S: Okay.

Ms. T: And I want to quote you *exac*tly the way you said it, I'm gonna have to use those kinds of words aren't I? Because if I change them—

Mario: It's not a quote.

Ms. T: If I change them then we don't know exactly how Mario said it. I'll make him sound like me—and that's not how Mario sounded. And if I wanted—if I want people to hear, hear it in their head, okay, if I want them to hear, how Mario sounds, I'm gonna (sic) use it the way it sounds, inside the quotation marks. And that makes it okay. Is that clear? Do you understand what I mean?

The treatment of language usage thus emerged as a significant difference in the two teachers' approaches to teaching English; as Bloome (1991) notes, teachers' assumptions about language may have important consequences for nonmainstream students:

> The official language of education [in the United States] is not any English but a specific English often referred to as Standard English.[12] Those who do not speak Standard English in school are often viewed as disadvantaged, less academically capable, or, more generously, needing to learn to code-switch into Standard English in order to be succcessful in the mainstream society. Whether there is or is not a Standard English . . . whether students who do not speak Standard English are or are not disadvantaged, less academically capable . . . [are less issues than that] educators, researchers, and others, take for granted Standard English as the language of education. . . . Perhaps as important as choosing English as the language of education, is the way that choice is enacted. African American and Hispanic students are often made to feel less academically capable and that their home, community, and culture are less valuable because they do not speak Standard English (p.48).

In choosing not to mark nonstandard English usage as inferior, and in envisioning students as writers regardless of how closely they adhere to reigning assumptions of what constitutes "good writing," Mrs. T. affirms their sense of themselves as effective speakers and writers. Mario, the Puerto Rican student who had raised the issue about whether "gonna" and "ain't" were words, offered an unsolicited evaluation of the effect of Mrs. T.'s classroom on his own sense of efficacy as a writer, in an interview the subsequent school year:

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[12] [Footnote as it appears in Bloome's text:] The term Standard English is problematic because it suggests a standard by which other varieties of English and other languages are measured and compared. While such measurements may occur, there is nothing inherent in Standard English that makes it a standard.

EB: [Interviewer responding to Mario's statement that he feels more open about his writing now] What do you mean by open?

Mario: Like I don't mind writing any more. Like writing stories and stuff. I use to get intimidated.

EB: What do you mean by intimidated?

Mario: Like if I have to write a story, I wouldn't be able to (). I couldn't put it down on the paper. I couldn't put what I wanted to. I would put something else.

EB: Why couldn't you put down what you wanted to?

Mario: Like it wouldn't make sense. I always like skip words or I'll put the wrong word down. I'll leave out a letter, or I'll spell another word.

EB: Uh huh, that's interesting that you can remember that. And now you have a different sense of it, now you feel more comfortable writing?

Mario: Yeah, I think it was Ms. T. that did it for me.

EB: How so? I mean, how did she get you to feel more comfortable about it?

Mario: She made me feel more better. She would always like say it was good, she says yeah I can do it, she gave me that little push I needed. And Mrs. M. (the reading teacher) helped too.

EB: And before what would happen, with earlier teachers?

Mario: I would take, they told me to do it and I'd take a long time to do it. I wouldn't do it or it would come in late.

EB: Did they act differently toward the writing? When they got it? I mean you said that Mrs. T., like encouraged you, and said good things about it?

Mario: Yeah, she really gave me more attention to it.

EB: And what would happen before, when you turned in something?

Mario: Oh nothing, they would, they would take it. And they wouldn't really tell me anything about it. They would just give it back, tell me what I got and that's it. Or they would say what, like that word is wrong. Mrs. T. she like points out, she helps me with it.

EB: How does she help you?

Mario: She would point out it, and then she would tell me why it's wrong, and how it was wrong, and she would tell me what I could do better. Like she would just give me (), she would make me feel positive about it. More positive.

EB: How does she make you feel positive?

Mario: Like what she does and says to me. Like once she made us write a story. And then if something was wrong, she will tell me why it was wrong. And how, what I did to it to make it wrong. And she said, and then said, and then she started saying it was good though, she wouldn't just give me like the negative parts, she gave positive parts too, and the other teachers really wouldn't give me the positive, they would just give me the negative.

DISCUSSION

Both Mrs. L. and Mrs. T. want their students to become more proficient readers and writers, but their approaches to achieving their goals are driven by differing assumptions about language learning, relations to texts, and whose knowledge and ways of speaking are to be heard in classrooms. These differing orientations in turn significantly shape the classroom context in which their students encounter schooled literacy.

That Mrs. T. was profoundly influenced by her student-teaching experience points to the importance of such educational opportunities for aspiring teachers. Teacher-training institutions and student-teaching experiences can provide students much-needed opportunities to examine literacy acquisition in homes and schools and to explore the ways in which the languages and cultures of students can be excluded or incorporated into classroom learning and lessons to better foster student engagement and learning.

Promoting change among teachers already in the field, however, is far more problematic. Mrs. L.'s adherence to traditional methods in English language arts instruction is not unusual. Despite major changes in theory and research on language learning, as Simmons (1991, p. 327) notes, "it is traditional grammar and prescriptive, 'right-wrong' usage that continues to hold sway today in junior high English curricula." Britton and Chorny (1991), assessing the current state of English language arts instruction, substantiate his claims:

> In spite of periodic endeavors to modify the nature and function of English programs in schools, in light of new knowledge and changing times, the ideas that informed teaching and learning in earlier decades of public education can be perceived as having remained dominant. . . . The focus of the traditional perspective is on elements of language usage, rather than upon processes by which language mastery is acquired; on the development of language skills in isolation, rather than on contexts of which they are constituent parts; on the skills of reading, often without complementary reference to the skills of writing, rather than on the process of mastering the written language, with its effect on cognitive growth;

> on literature and knowledge about works of literature, rather than on the experience or response to such works; on learning in school, without recognition of the knowledge and language that students bring to school; all these in association with a sense that teachers are to be the sole arbiters and dispensers of knowledge in the classroom. (p.110)

The assumptions that teachers bring to the classroom are shaped by their own cultural, biographical, and institutional experiences. Tracking students and large class sizes further enhance the likelihood of teachers' continued reliance on "seatwork," objective tests, and grammar-based approaches to language learning in order to maintain a semblance of order and a reasonable workload. When administrative emphasis is on "orderly" and quiet classrooms, teachers may also be reluctant to experiment with new approaches that generate student "noise" and move the focus of students' attention away from the teacher.

With traditional approaches, evaluation criteria are also much more clear-cut: students' mastery of grammatical conventions, spelling, and authorial intentions can be evaluated and used as a marker of student progress on tests that purport to measure student achievement, providing teachers and the public with assurances that their students are learning—or not learning—what is being taught in schools. The increasing dependence on standardized tests in public schools also fosters the kinds of teaching we see in Mrs. L.'s classroom. The "back to the basics" movement that gained momentum in the 1970s meant both a renewed interest in "the grammar text, workbook, spelling list motif of yore" (Simmons, 1991, p. 329) and pressures for more standardized tests as a means of measuring students' "progress." In 1977, for instance, with the rise of statewide testing, the Warriner's series *English Composition and Grammar* broke all sales records (Simmons, 1991). American students today are tested more than children in any other country (Resnick, 1982, in Johnston, 1992); at the secondary level, students lose approximately ten instructional days per year to standardized tests, excluding classroom preparation explicitly *for* the test (Johnston, 1992, p. 4). Increased reliance on such tests may actually be counterproductive: Purves for instance points to arguments against minimum competency tests for having "produced a circumscribing of the curriculum to a point where it merely prepared students for the test rather than being concerned with broad educative functions" (Purves, 1984, in Farr & Beck, 1991, p. 494).

Educators and researchers, meanwhile, including among them advocates of "whole language" and "reader response" approaches, assail the ability of standardized multiple choice tests to adequately and meaningfully evaluate students' progress in the English language arts (cf. Farr & Beck, 1991; Johnston, 1992). While the many critiques of such tests—ranging from the disempowerment of teachers to the consequences of labeling students who fall below the norm as "failures"—are beyond the scope of this project (but see, for instance, Johnston, 1992; Miner, 1991), perhaps most salient is that if such practices are to be critiqued, educators (including both administrators and teachers) will need opportunities to examine the "commonsense" assumptions about testing—as well as language learning—that drive such practices.

The taken-for-granted assumptions about language learning that have long undergirded traditional English language arts teaching are now being called into question; "whole language" or process approaches to writing and reader-response approaches to literature offer promising alternatives to traditional teaching methods in the English language arts, and can provide opportunities for students to bring their own lives and perspectives to their reading and writing.

Multicultural literature in the classroom can provide students and teachers opportunities to explore diverse ways of being in the world in a context in which cultural and linguistic diversity are invited into the classroom.

The school curriculum is not a neutral body of knowledge to be transmitted to students: that we include and legitimate some knowledges, and that we exclude other knowledges through the choices we make in school texts, tests, and talk needs to be raised to a conscious level amongst all educators, and examined in light of its possible consequences for students. Creating environments in which students' "ways with words" and lived experiences are conceptualized as resources in assisting students as they build bridges to the larger world requires more than the introduction of new methods of teaching into the English classroom. "Rethinking" schools also requires placing critique front and center. Current progressive theories that ignore or marginalize the underlying systems of domination that drive much linguistic and cultural "difference," as Edelsky (1994) cautions:

> can as easily support *avoiding* looking at white privilege, for example, as they support looking *at* it. Those progressive theories and practices are correct, I believe, but they don't go far enough. They don't actively and primarily—as a first priority—tie language to power, tie text interpretation to societal structures, or tie reading and writing to perpetuating or resisting. . . . [Our theories] act as though language expression and language processing, although socially situated and constrained by social conventions, are primarily acts of individuals. Our theories-in-practice fail to take as their central focus the way language learning and language use are tied not only to people's individual experiences but also to people's societal positions, to their structured privilege, to their greater or lesser power, and to the interests of the groups they represent. We can't hope to change what's societal if we keep backgrounding what's societal. (pp. 254-255)

In such an environment, teachers might also talk about *who* says "gonna" and "ain't" aren't words; *why* many Puerto Ricans caught up in the migratory stream are poor; and *how* local schools work in ways that serve the needs of some students better than others.

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